

THE AMERICAN ALPINE JOURNAL

International Grade Comparison Chart

	YDS	UIAA	FR	AUS	SAX	CIS	SCA	BRA	UK		
<p>This chart is designed to be used with the <i>American Alpine Journal</i> to help decipher the difficulty ratings given to climbs.</p> <p>Seriousness Rating:</p> <p>These often modify the technical grades when protection is difficult.</p> <p>R: Poor protection with potential for a long fall and some injury.</p> <p>X: A fall would likely result in serious injury or death.</p>	5.2	II	1	10	II	III	3		D		
	5.3	III	2	11	III	III+	3+				
	5.4	IV- IV	3	12			IV-	4	4a	VD	
	5.5	IV+					IV	4+			
	5.6	V-	4	14			IV+	5-		S	
	5.7	V V+					5	4b			HS
	5.8	VI-	5a	16	VIIa	V-	5+			4 4+	
	5.9		5b	17	VIIc		5+	5 5+		4c	HVS
	5.10a	VI	5c	18	VIIIa	V	6-	6a		5b	
	5.10b	VI+					6a	VIIIb			6
	5.10c	VII-	6a+	19	VIIIc	V+	6+	6c		E2	
	5.10d	VII	6b	20	VIIIc		7-	6c			5c
	5.11a	VII+	6b+		IXa	VI-	7	7a		E4	
	5.11b	VIII-	6c	21	IXb		7+	7b			
	5.11c		6c+	22	IXc	7c	6a	E5			
	5.11d	VIII	7a	23	Xa	VI	8-			8a	
	5.12a	VIII+	7a+	24			8	8b			
	5.12b	IX-	7b	25	Xb	8+	8c	6b		E6	
	5.12c		7b+	26			9a				
5.12d	IX	7c	27	Xc	9-	9b	6c	E7			
5.13a	IX+	7c+	28			9c					
5.13b	X-	8a	29	XIa	VI+	10a	7a	E8			
5.13c		8a+	30			10b					
5.13d	X	8b	31	XIb	9+	10c	E9				
5.14a	X+	8b+	32			XIc		7b			
5.14b	XI-	8c	33	9a							
5.14c	XI	8c+									
5.14d	XI	9a									

YDS=Yosemite Decimal System; UIAA=Union Internationale des Associations D'Alpinisme; Fr=France/Sport; Aus=Australia; Sax=Saxony; CIS=Commonwealth of Independent States/Russia; Sca=Scandinavia; Bra=Brazil.



Most climbs in the American Alpine Journal are described with an alphabet soup of difficulty ratings. The *de facto* grading system in the AAJ is a combination of the American systems described below. If a different system is used, it will generally be identified by its nationality or region. The grading systems described here are condensed and updated from detailed descriptions in the 1999 AAJ, pages 477-484.

Ratings in the AAJ use the following sequence, as relevant to the climb and supplied by the climbers: commitment, rock, aid, mixed, ice, snow.

Only direct experience can fully convey the meaning of each grade, which in any case varies widely from region to region. The following descriptions **crudely approximate reality**, albeit without any of the sweat, pain, fear, and joy involved with the actual climbing.

National Climbing Classification System (USA):

NCCS grades, often called “commitment grades,” indicate the time investment in a route for an “average” climbing team.

I and II: Half a day or less for the technical (5th class) portion of the route.

III: Most of a day of roped climbing.

IV: A full day of technical climbing.

V: Typically requires an overnight on the route, or done fast and free in a day.

VI: Two or more days of hard climbing.

VII: Remote walls climbed in alpine style.

Alpine System:

The overall seriousness of the complete route based on all factors of the final approach, ascent, and descent—including length, altitude, danger, commitment, and technical difficulty. This system originated with UIAA Roman numerals; it is now generally seen with French letters and is increasingly being used worldwide.

F: Facile/easy. Rock scrambling or easy snow slopes; some glacier travel; often climbed ropeless except on glaciers.

PD: Peu Difficile/a little difficult. Some technical climbing and complicated glaciers.

AD: Assez Difficile/fairly hard. Steep climbing or long snow/ice slopes above 50°; for experienced alpine climbers only.

D: Difficile/difficult. Sustained hard rock and/or ice or snow; fairly serious stuff.

TD: Très Difficile/very difficult. Long, serious, remote, and highly technical.

ED: Extremement Difficile/extremely difficult. The most serious climbs with the most

continuous difficulties. Increasing levels of difficulty indicated by ED1, ED2, etc.

Alaska Grade:

An overall grade reflecting the remote, cold, stormy nature of Alaskan climbing. Rarely applied outside Alaska.

1: Easy glacier route.

2: Not technical, but exposed to knife-edged ridges, weather, and altitude.

3: Moderate to hard, including some technical climbing.

4: Hard to difficult.

5: Difficult, with sustained climbing, high commitment, and few bivouac sites.

6: Sustained hard climbing over thousands of vertical feet; high commitment.

Russian Grade:

The overall grade factors in UIAA technical ratings (the Roman numerals).

1B: Some easy roped climbing.

2A: Several pitches of easy roped climbing.

2B: Some II+ and III climbing on a multi-pitch route.

3A: Contains 1-1.5 pitches of III climbing on a multi-pitch route.

3B: One or two pitches of III+/IV climbing on a full-day route.

4A: A full day route with IV+ climbing.

4B: Several pitches of IV+ or some V+ climbing.

5A: Contains several pitches of V climbing on a 1- to 3-day route.

5B: Two-plus days with some VI+ climbing.

6A and 6B: Multi-day routes with considerable VI or harder climbing.

Aid Grades:

New routes put-up by big-wall aficionados often are given a "New Wave" rating using the original symbols with new definitions. When the letter "C" replaces "A," the rating refers to "clean" climbing—i.e., without a hammer.

Original Aid Rating System:

A0: Occasional aid moves often done without aiders (etriers) or climbed on fixed gear; sometimes called "French free."

A1: All placements are solid and easy.

A2: Good placements, but sometimes tricky.

A3: Many difficult, insecure placements, but with little risk.

A4: Many placements in a row that hold nothing more than body weight.

A5: Enough body-weight placements in a row that one failure results in a fall of at least 20 meters.

New Wave Aid Ratings:

A1: Easy aid. No risk of a piece pulling out.

A2: Moderate aid. Solid gear that's more difficult to place.

A2+: 10-meter fall potential from tenuous placements, but without danger.

A3: Hard aid. Many tenuous placements in a row; 15-meter fall potential; could require several hours for a single pitch.

A3+: A3 with dangerous fall potential.

A4: Serious aid. 30-meter ledge-fall potential from continuously tenuous gear.

A4+: Even more serious, with even greater fall potential, where each pitch could take many hours to lead.

A5: Extreme aid. Nothing on the entire pitch can be trusted to hold a fall.

A6: A5 climbing with belay anchors that won't hold a fall either.

Scottish Winter Grades:

These apply to ice and mixed conditions and are used primarily by climbers familiar with Scottish conditions. Roman numerals are the overall grades, while Arabic numbers are the technical grade of the hardest section. Scottish technical ratings are approximately 1 generous numeral higher than equivalent Water Ice or M-grades. Technical grade 5 is relatively

straightforward, 6 is somewhat technical mixed climbing, and 7 and 8 are much more intricate, including harder snowed-up rock. The current range is 4-9. A complete grade is expressed as VI,8.

I: Snow gullies and easy ridges.

II: Steep snow where two ice tools may be required but technical difficulties are short. Possible difficult cornice exit.

III: Mixed ascents of moderate rock routes; icy gullies; sustained buttresses.

IV: Steep ice with short vertical steps or long pitches up to 70°, or mixed routes requiring advanced techniques.

V: Sustained ice to 80° or mixed climbs with linked hard moves. Climbs are difficult, sustained, and/or serious.

VI: Vertical ice and highly technical mixed routes. Grade VI and above routes have exceptional overall difficulties.

VII: Multi-pitch routes with long sections of vertical or thin ice, or mixed routes with lots of highly technical climbing.

VIII-IX: The hardest routes in Scotland.

Canadian Winter Commitment Grade:

This combines length, hazard, and overall challenges.

I-II: 1 or 2 pitches near the car, but may need to be avoided during avalanche season.

III: Requires most of a day including the approach, which may require winter travel skills (possible avalanche terrain, placing descent anchors).

IV: A multipitch route at higher altitude or remote location. Multi-hour approaches in serious alpine terrain.

V: A full-day climb in alpine terrain with a long approach, long technical descent, and objective dangers.

VI: A long waterfall with the character of an alpine route; formerly required at least a day to complete, now often done faster. Significant alpine objective hazards.

VII: Under discussion.

Mixed Grade:

These routes require considerable dry tooling (modern ice tools used on bare rock) and are climbed in crampons; actual ice is optional but some ice is usually involved.

M1-3: Easy. Low angle; usually no tools.
M4: Slabby to vertical with some technical dry tooling.
M5: Some sustained vertical dry tooling.
M6: Vertical to overhanging with difficult dry tooling.
M7: Overhanging; powerful and technical dry tooling; less than 10m of hard climbing.
M8: Some nearly horizontal overhangs requiring very powerful and technical dry tooling; bouldery or longer cruxes than M7.
M9: Either continuously vertical or slightly overhanging with marginal or technical holds, or a juggy roof of 2 to 3 body lengths.
M10: At least 10 meters of horizontal rock or 30 meters of overhanging dry tooling with powerful moves and no rests.
M11: A ropelength of overhanging gymnastic climbing, or up to 15 meters of roof.
M12: M11 with bouldery, dynamic moves and tenuous technical holds.

Water Ice and Alpine Ice Grades:

Ice climbing ratings are highly variable by region and are still evolving. The following descriptions approximate the average systems. The WI acronym implies seasonal ice; AI is often substituted for year-around Alpine Ice and may be easier than a WI grade with the

same number. Canadians often drop the WI symbol and hyphenate the technical grade after the Canadian commitment grade's Roman numeral (example: II-5).

WI1: Low angle ice; no tools required.
WI2: Consistent 60° ice with possible bulges; good protection.
WI3: Sustained 70° with possible long bulges of 80°-90°; reasonable rests and good stances for placing screws.
WI4: Continuous 80° ice fairly long sections of 90° ice broken up by occasional rests.
WI5: Long and strenuous, with a rope-length of 85°-90° ice offering few good rests; or a shorter pitch of thin or bad ice with protection that's difficult to place.
WI6: A full ropelength of near-90° ice with no rests, or a shorter pitch even more tenuous than WI 5. Highly technical.
WI7: As above, but on thin poorly bonded ice or long, overhanging poorly adhered columns. Protection is impossible or very difficult to place and of dubious quality.
WI8: Under discussion.

Snow:

Snow is often described by its steepest angle (ex.: 70°) or by a range approximating its steepest angle (ex.: 70°-80°).

The Gore Shipton/Tilman Grant:

Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman have inspired many outdoor enthusiasts to push themselves and follow their dreams. Shipton and Tilman preferred small teams, unburdened by porters and excessive bulk; they thrilled at getting by on the bare minimum. Selecting a team was as important as how they traveled: they chose close friends who shared respect and trust.

W. L. Gore & Associates, Inc. established the annual Shipton/Tilman Grant as a tribute to the spirit of adventure embodied by Shipton and Tilman. The Grant provides \$30,000 each year to be divided among three to six expeditions that are most in harmony with Shipton and Tilman's philosophies. Applications are accepted from small, unencumbered teams of friends with daring and imaginative goals. The expedition team must plan to accomplish their feat in a self-propelled, environmentally sound, and cost-effective way. Eric Shipton and H. W. Tilman were prolific authors, and we encourage all applicants to read their books to gain a better understanding of their philosophies.

For more information, or to apply for the grant, visit www.gore-tex.com/stg

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